

The Walcutt

AN

ORATION,

DELIVERED

At MACHIAS,

February 11, 1794.

AT THE CELEBRATION

OF THE

BIRTH-DAY

OF

PRESIDENT WASHINGTON.

By JOHN COOPER, Esq.

"To give stability to a popular government, a democratic character must be formed, and democratic sentiments inspired."

MACKINTOSH.

PRINTED by BENJAMIN EDES & SON, in Kilby-Street,
BOSTON.

MDCCXCIV.

AS the polite request of my fellow-townsmen induced me to pronounce this Oration, their generous partiality must apologize for its publication.—

J. COOPER.



AN
O R A T I O N.

RESPECTED FELLOW CITIZENS,

ASSEMBLED to participate in the general joy, which, on this auspicious day pervades our country, the Speaker hopes your candor, while agreeable to your request, he addresses you on this pleasing occasion.

THE tragical events that have recently taken place in the old world, presents a melancholy view of the miseries of millions of our fellow-men.—While fruitful regions, once decked by nature with her richest gifts, are now become the theatres of bloody and destructive wars—while mad ambition which, recollection tells us, once forced our native country to bleed through every pore, now rages with tenfold fury over the greatest part of Europe; it may be useful for us, when comparing our present happy state with theirs, to consider a few, of the many causes, that join to present this striking contrast.

At

AT the beginning of the seventeenth century, the tyranny which Priests and Kings usurped over the minds and bodies of men, first urged our venerable ancestors to that freedom of enquiry, which ended in their firmly resolving, to cherish and maintain those sacred rights, with which, they felt, the God of nature had endowed them.

FROM this period, their opposition to an impos'd conformity to the established doctrines both of church and state became uniform, and they nobly dared to relinquish every prospect of worldly good, and to suffer the severest persecution, rather than enjoy the one at the expense of their consciences, or elude the other by deserting their principles.

AMERICA at this dangerous crisis offered an asylum to our persecuted progenitors—they saw in perspective, this western region, as promising them the full enjoyment of their civil and religious claim.—Supported by these prospects, they crossed the atlantic, and safely landed in the new world.—Soon after their arrival, the inclemency of the seasons, and the fierceness of the natives, opened to them the horrors of their situation :—they were afflicted, but they were not discouraged,—a number of succeeding years, though marked with the most disastrous events, witnessed their perseverance,
while

while their courage was equalled only by their sufferings.—Revolving time eventually brought with it intervals of peace ; these were fortunately improved ; nature was divested of her rude attire, and began to be embellished with the useful ornaments of civilization.

MANY were the valuable institutions established by our ancestors to impress on their descendents the importance of those rights for which they contended.—The measures adopted for this laudable purpose were as successful as they were virtuous.—While we thus contemplate their patriotic exertions in the cause of Freedom, do not our hearts exult to find, that their posterity still glory in guarding those privileges which are the basis of its establishment?—May we ever act worthy the character of Freemen, by cultivating those seeds of Liberty planted by our ancestors ; and may the most suitable means to bring them to maturity, become the noble employment of the present generation.

THE rapid population of the first settlers, together with a difference, in some speculative points of religious policy, had generated other colonies, and altogether formed the New England provinces, —Though a difference in opinion first caused these separations, they were still firmly united in their
enthusiastic

enthusiastic veneration for civil and religious liberty ; on this account the conduct of New-England sensibly affected the principles of those other governments in America, that had been settled on various motives, and at different periods.

I SHALL pass over the interesting occurrences of a century, in which the increasing glory of the rising states had become an object of jealousy to the mother country, and which was frequently marked with instances of arbitrary oppression on the one hand, and respectful, but firm resistance, on the other ; and draw your attention to that memorable period, when the British parliament would have degraded us to the infamous condition of bondsmen and slaves, by declaring their right to bind the Colonies in all cases whatever, effectually annihilated every sentiment of reciprocal friendship or affection. At this important æra, the enlightened opposition of the people of New-England demonstrated the unconquerable aversion to tyranny, which they inherited from their ancestors ; and after a long though unsuccessful trial to obtain by treaty, what they had a right to demand, they nobly resolved to redress themselves ; and, in conjunction with the other states, appealed to the sword as the last resource.

THE unanimity of the Colonies, on this memorable occasion, was as conspicuous as their resolution ; but in no instance was it more happily exerted than in the appointment of the chief Commander of their armies—the guardian genius of America presided at the choice, and gladly wove the fairest laurels for her favourite WASHINGTON—long may they flourish to adorn his brows, and droop only at the radiant splendor of an immortal crown.

WHILE the armies of America were combating under the auspices of their gallant Chief, the Declaration of Independence was promulgated by Congress, and received with rapturous applause by every state in the union. Shall I remind you, that this Declaration bore the signature of the late Governor of Massachusetts, and was one of the many immortal acts that will consecrate his fame to posterity—his eulogy is beyond my reach—but O illustrious shade ! if in thy blessed abode thou art permitted to inspect the conduct of the sons of men, often shall thou view the patriot, the hero, and the philanthropist, repairing to thy tomb, and swearing by the memory of HANCOCK, to aim at imitating the exalted virtues taught them by thy bright example.

AFTER

AFTER the Declaration of Independence had given the United States a rank among the nations of the earth, several European powers became interested in their success; but it will ever be held in grateful remembrance, that France became our first and noblest ally. With her friendly aid, America was enabled to triumph over the efforts of Britain, and finally establish her Independence on the firmest basis.

WHEN peace had again revisited the United States, the numerous defects of the old Confederation, clearly pointed out the necessity of a more efficient government. After some time had elapsed, a Convention was formed for this valuable purpose. The Federal Constitution was the result of their deliberation, and being recommended to the several States for their concurrence, was adopted with the proposition of a few amendments. Thus happily united in the form of our government, we cannot but anticipate its blessings, when we reflect that the same illustrious character, that once so ably directed the military affairs of the Union, now presides over its civil concerns, with equal honor to himself, and glory to his country.

THIS important change was effected without any of those evils that have been the constant attendants
on

on the alteration of constitutions in other countries—but this will be readily accounted for if we compare our situation with theirs.—In America the principles of civil freedom have ever been universally disseminated, and as universally cherished. The people from their earliest years, accustomed to the frequent recognition of the Rights of Man, when called upon to deliberate on so important a subject as the establishment of a new constitution, were not confounded by the magnitude of the object. Though a great difference in interest and sentiment existed among the inhabitants of so vast an extent of territory, they were all united in the grand fundamental principles of freedom and good government. They had no prejudices to combat that were unfavourable to their cause—no incendiaries from within—no tyrants from without, to influence their conduct, or perplex their proceedings—but calm, collected and enlightened, they met without confusion, they debated with candor, they decided from conviction, and their decision has placed America among the most favoured nations of the world.

Not to darken the joy of the present day, but to indulge the feelings gratitude inspires, allow me to direct your attention to the present situation of a
generous

generous people, whose blood, with that of our brethren, frequently flowed in the same channel, when together vindicating the Independence of America. That glorious thirst for Freedom which the American cause excited in France, aided by the more general diffusion of Republican principles, by those who had returned from their successful warfare in America, accelerated the resolution of the French nation, to destroy their government, confessedly one of the most despotic in Europe, and to establish another that should have for its object, not the splendor of a King, but the Liberties of the People. Most grateful would be the task, could I trace the operation of similar principles, attended with similar success, in the French, as in the American revolution. But truly melancholy have been the events that forbid this pleasing delineation.— We read with horror, the accounts of thousands slaughtered in the fields of battle, and tho' the feeling heart is agonized at the recital of some melancholy occurrences, yet the patriotic mind will hesitate before it suddenly vents its indignation against the ostensible authors of these calamities, and strive to find, if in their situation or circumstances, any thing can account for such painful severities.— In pursuing the enquiry, we find opposed to the principles of the French revolution, a court, that
for

for centuries had been accustomed to the unreserved adoration and submission of more than twenty millions of subjects. The numerous dependants on this court, imitating the tyranny of their royal master, had uniformly assisted in keeping the common people in the most abject state of ignorance and the kingdom of France, by nature one of the fairest portions of the globe, presented the most complete system of oppression, the ingenuity of despotism could invent.—Add to this the prejudices of a religion, that for ages had commanded the veneration of its votaries, and had incessantly impressed upon their hearts, that devotion to the Prince was obedience to God.—When the French determined to be free, such was their unanimity and resolution, that these formidable obstacles were likely to be removed, when a combination of European Kings arrogantly threatened the immediate, and total destruction of those sacred principles of liberty, that had just began to illuminate and adorn their Country. These principles they had sworn to resign but with their lives—and in this situation, with veteran armies of mercenaries on their borders, and numerous incendiaries in the very heart of France, without one friendly ally of sufficient consequence to ward off the efforts of united despots—they may have felt themselves reduced

duced to the necessity of enforcing that severity, which can be only justified by the great acknowledged law of self-preservation.

FROM this slight review how totally different does the situation and circumstances of the French nation appear while asserting their freedom, from that of America, when engaged in the same virtuous pursuits—so distinct are the immediate horrors that surround the one from the distant evils which impended over the other—that the enquiring mind while it views the independence of America, as resulting in a great measure, not only from her situation, but the natural genius of her people, is astonished, that the liberties of the French, from their peculiar circumstances, are maintained with so few trespasses on the feelings of humanity.—This will be allowed, the striking features in both revolutions correspond, so far as the French profess the same enthusiasm for the natural rights of man, and the same determination to vindicate & support them.—While their destiny yet remains to be unfolded in the book of fate, let us fervently hope, that as they are struggling for the same sacred privileges, that influenced the exertions of Americans, in their revolution, they may through the like favor of Providence eventually realize the same success.

LIBERTY

LIBERTY my beloved countrymen, never yet continued for any length of time, to bless a nation that was generally incapable of estimating its real worth, that the people should frequently advert to their original rights, and superintend with determined vigilance the conduct of their officers, is not more their inestimable privilege, than their indispensable duty—for the experience of ages proves that the introduction of oppressive servitude in every Country, is more surely effected by the ignorance or neglect of the many, than the villany or ambition of the few.

MAY *jealousy* ever form a principal trait in the American character:—not that *barbarous spirit* which so often disgraced the **ROMAN** and **GRECIAN** **REPUBLICS**,—nor that *malignant passion*, which sickens at the view of private honor or happiness, but that *becoming pride of judgment*, which influences a free people to seek rather to prevent than to punish crimes, and which by frequently reminding the rulers and the ruled of their respective obligations, opposes the most insuperable bar to every species of usurpation.

NOTHING can more grossly reflect on the understanding or feelings of men, apprized of their rank in the scale of beings, than to suppose them capable
of

of being deluded from their duty, or blinded to their interest, by the speeches or publications of designing men. Those who are continually exclaiming against the declamation of demagogues, or the speculations of interested individuals, should remember, that the liberties of speech and the press, though they may circulate false sentiments, admit, in the fullest extent, the same opportunity for counteracting them; and that honest men, and honest measures, never need fear the scrutinizing eye of a people, accustomed to decide, not from the sudden impulse of a moment, but from the calm conviction of reason and propriety.—Though intrusive zeal may at times unnecessarily agitate the public mind, the general sentiment of a free and virtuous people will be that “**WHATEVER VOICE SPEAKS TRUTH, OR WHATEVER HAND ESTABLISHES FREEDOM, DELIVERS THE ORACLES, AND DISPENSES THE GIFTS OF GOD.**”

MAY the various blessings of Peace, Liberty, and Safety, adorn our favoured land, and improving with increasing years, perpetuate its glory, until the last trump proclaims the exit of the **UNIVERSE.**

FINIS.

